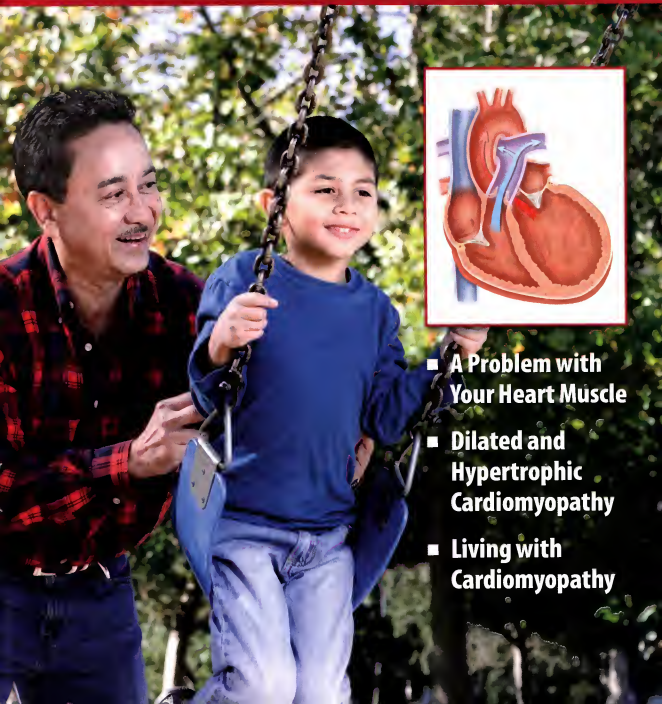


# Understanding Cardiomyopathy



- **A Problem with Your Heart Muscle**
- **Dilated and Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy**
- **Living with Cardiomyopathy**

# What Is Cardiomyopathy?

If you have cardiomyopathy, you have a problem with the muscle tissue that makes up your heart. Cardiomyopathy means “heart muscle disease.” Your heart may not be pumping as well as it should. You and your doctor can work together to help your heart. Read this booklet to learn more about cardiomyopathy.

## Types of Cardiomyopathy

With **dilated cardiomyopathy**, the heart thins and enlarges. This is the most common type. With **hypertrophic cardiomyopathy**, the heart muscle thickens. It is often found in young, active people. With **restrictive cardiomyopathy**, the heart muscle becomes hard and stiff. This type is very uncommon, and won't be discussed further in this booklet.

### Symptoms of Dilated Cardiomyopathy

Common symptoms include:

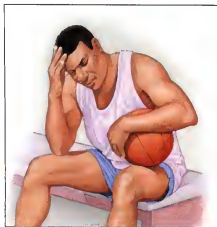
- Shortness of breath when you exert yourself
- Unexplained tiredness or weakness
- Chest pain
- Fluid buildup in the lungs. You may need extra pillows to help you breathe when you lie down.
- Fluid retention resulting in swollen feet or ankles or unexplained weight gain



### Symptoms of Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy often causes no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they often happen when you exert yourself. Symptoms may include:

- Problems catching your breath
- Unexplained tiredness
- Lightheadedness, dizzy spells, or fainting
- Rapid, pounding heartbeat
- Chest tightness or pressure
- Fluid retention resulting in swollen feet or ankles or unexplained weight gain



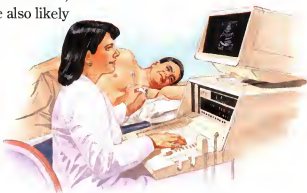
This booklet is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Only your doctor can diagnose and treat a medical problem.

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## Evaluating Your Condition

To learn more about your heart, your doctor will examine you. He or she will also ask questions about your health, your habits, and your family history. Tests are also likely to be done. These may include:

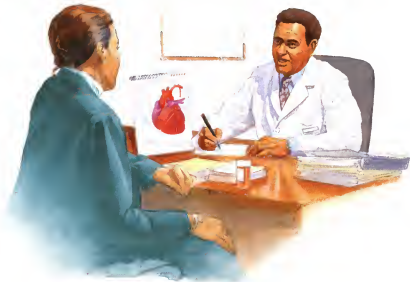
- **Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG)** to show the pattern of your heartbeat.
- **Echocardiogram** to show the size and shape of your heart. This test also shows whether or not your heart is pumping normally. The amount of blood pumped into your body with each heartbeat is called an ejection fraction.
- **Cardiac catheterization** or a **nuclear scan** if more information is needed. These tests can show the health of the heart muscle and how well blood flows through the heart's vessels.



During an echocardiogram, sound waves are used to show an image of the heart on a monitor.

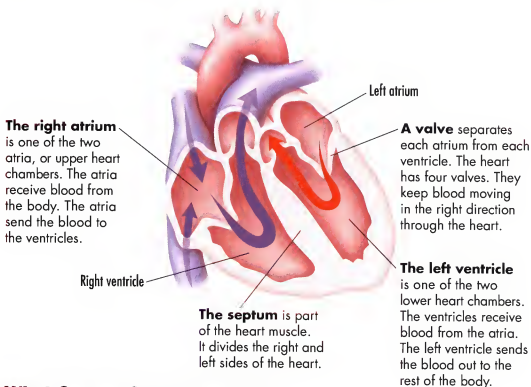
## Your Treatment Plan

Cardiomyopathy doesn't go away. But it can be treated. Treatment can help keep cardiomyopathy from getting worse, and can reduce your symptoms. Treatment can also help prevent **heart failure**. (Heart failure happens when the heart muscle weakens so much that it can't move enough blood. Fluid then builds up in the lungs and the rest of the body.) Your doctor will work with you to develop a treatment plan to help you feel better now and prevent problems in the future.



# A Change in How Your Heart Pumps

The heart is a muscle that squeezes to pump blood through the body. Four chambers hold blood as it moves through the heart. The right chambers pump blood to the lungs. There, the blood receives oxygen. Oxygen-rich blood then travels to the left chambers and is pumped to the rest of the body. With cardiomyopathy, the heart muscle is damaged and doesn't pump as well as it should.



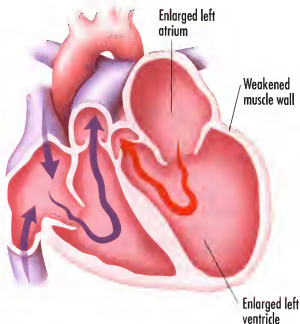
## What Causes Cardiomyopathy?

In many cases of cardiomyopathy, an exact cause is never known. Possible causes of dilated cardiomyopathy include:

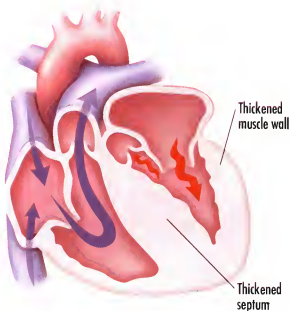
- **Coronary artery disease** (narrowing of the heart's blood vessels). The resulting damage to the heart muscle is often known as **ischemic cardiomyopathy**.
- Heavy alcohol use over a long period of time
- Infection or inflammation of the heart muscle
- Use of certain cancer medications
- High blood pressure
- Problems for a woman during pregnancy and childbirth

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is a **genetic disorder** that is sometimes passed from one generation to the next.

## When You Have Cardiomyopathy



**With dilated cardiomyopathy**, the heart muscle has been damaged. A damaged heart muscle cannot move as much blood as before. To try to pump enough blood, the heart muscle stretches so it can hold more. The chambers, especially on the left side of the heart, often **dilate** (get larger). Larger chambers may help move more blood for a while. But, in time, the stretched-out muscle gets even weaker and tires out.



**With hypertrophic cardiomyopathy**, the heart muscle grows thicker and stiffer than normal, especially the walls of the left ventricle and septum. Thickened muscle walls mean chambers hold less blood. Thick walls may also block blood flow and damage valves. A stiff heart muscle can't relax between pumps the way it should, so less blood moves with each pump. Also, the heart may sometimes beat **irregularly** (too fast and out of rhythm).

# Living with Cardiomyopathy

Your doctor will outline a treatment plan to help you live better with cardiomyopathy and stop it from getting worse. Be sure to follow your doctor's instructions. You can also make some lifestyle changes that will help your heart.

## Follow Your Treatment Plan

Your treatment plan may include:

- Making lifestyle changes such as balancing activity and rest, quitting smoking, and tracking your weight
- Eating less salt, if so instructed. Follow your healthcare provider's advice.
- Taking medications and having medical treatments

Be sure to visit your doctor regularly. Mention any problems you are having with your treatment plan. Be honest if you are not doing something your doctor has suggested. He or she may be able to make some changes to help your plan work better for you. Remember that your treatment will help you feel better now and in the future.

## Balance Activity and Rest

Having cardiomyopathy may mean you get tired more quickly. But this shouldn't keep you from being active. In fact, being active may help you feel better. Talk with your doctor about how much activity is right for you. Ask what kind of exercise you can do safely. But know your limits. Stop and rest if you feel tired or out of breath.



Don't push yourself too hard—rest when you feel tired.

## Taking Steps to Help Your Heart

Below are some steps you can take to be healthier and help make your heart's work easier.

- Stop smoking. Smoking damages your heart muscle and blood vessels. It reduces the oxygen in your blood. It makes your heart beat faster and work harder. And it can make a heart attack more likely.
- Lose any excess weight. The more extra weight you have, the harder your heart has to work to pump blood through your body.
- Avoid alcohol. Drinking alcohol may make your cardiomyopathy worse.



## Keep Track of Your Weight

Rapid weight gain may mean that you are retaining fluid, which is one of the signs of heart failure. Keeping track of your weight helps you detect this weight gain early and prevent further damage to your heart. To keep track of your weight:

- Weigh yourself at the same time each day, after you urinate. Wear the same thing each time.
- Write down your weight each day.
- Don't stop weighing yourself. If you forget one day, weigh again the next morning.
- Call your doctor if you gain 2 or more pounds in one day, or if you gain 3 to 5 pounds in one week.



Keep track of your weight and write down your results.

## WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

Call your doctor if you:

- Faint or have dizzy spells
- Notice new symptoms from your medication
- Have a new onset of coughing
- Have trouble breathing, especially if it occurs while at rest or lying down
- Get tired faster
- Begin urinating less often
- Find that your feet or ankles swell more than usual
- Have tightness or pain in your chest

# Medications to Help Your Heart

Medications can help you to both feel better and stay as healthy as you can. Take your medications exactly as instructed. Never stop taking medications or change dosage unless told to by your doctor, even if you feel better.

## Medications for Cardiomyopathy

Your doctor may prescribe one or more of the following medications:

**ACE inhibitors** help blood flow more easily by relaxing blood vessels and lowering blood pressure. This lets the heart pump more blood without doing more work.

**Anticoagulants** help prevent blood clots.

**Antiarrhythmics** may be used to control a fast or irregular heartbeat.

**Beta-blockers** slow the heart rate, which lessens the work the heart has to do. They may also help keep the heartbeat regular.

**Calcium channel blockers** dilate blood vessels and slow the heart rate.

**Diuretics** help rid the body of excess fluid. Having less fluid to pump makes a heart's job easier. Getting rid of extra water can also help reduce swelling, bloating, and shortness of breath.

**Digitalis** helps the heart pump with more strength. This helps the heart pump more blood with each beat. Digitalis may also keep the heartbeat regular.



Talk with a pharmacist about how to use and store your medications safely.

## Medical Treatments

If fast heartbeat is a problem, procedures (cardioversion or ablation) may be done to help restore normal heart rate. In some cases, a special device is implanted. This device, called an **ICD** (implantable cardioverter defibrillator), can monitor and control heart rhythm. If needed, an ICD can correct certain types of dangerous rhythms. An ICD can also be modified to coordinate muscle function between both sides of the heart (biventricular pacing). Surgery on the heart valves or the heart muscle wall can correct problems with blood flow. For those who are very sick, a heart transplant may be an option. Your healthcare provider will tell you about any of these treatments that might be right for you.



## Tips for Taking Your Medications

Medications only work if you take them on time and as directed. Make taking your medications part of your daily routine.

To help you do this, try these tips:

- Read and follow the directions on the prescription label.
- Get a pillbox marked with the days of the week. Fill the pillbox at the start of each week. Then open each section to take your pills for that day.
- Take your medication at the same time or times each day. Make it a habit.
- Don't run out of medication. Order more medication when you have a one- to two-week supply of pills left.
- Be sure to bring your medications with you when you travel.
- Have a list of the medications you take. Show the list to any doctor you visit for treatment. Also show it to the pharmacist before you buy over-the-counter or prescription medication.
- If you can't or won't take your medication for any reason, tell your doctor.



A pillbox can help you keep track of your medications.



Take your medication at the same time each day.

## Coping with Side Effects

Some of the medications you take may cause side effects. Side effects may include nausea, dry cough, dizziness, muscle cramps, or changes in your heartbeat. If you have any of these or other symptoms that bother you after starting a medication, tell your doctor right away. Your doctor may be able to adjust your dosage or give you a different medication. **Never** stop taking your medication or change your dose on your own.

# Eating Less Salt

Your doctor may have told you to eat less salt. Salt is the main source of **sodium** in our diet. Too much sodium can make the symptoms of cardiomyopathy worse. Cutting back on the amount of salt you eat may help you feel better. Try the tips on these pages to get started.

## When Cooking

- **Look for low-salt recipes.** They are healthy for your heart and can taste good, too.
- **Don't add salt to food** when you're cooking. Instead, season your foods with high-flavor ingredients such as pepper, lemon, garlic, and onion.
- **Cook with fresh foods.** When foods are processed and put into boxes or cans, a lot of salt is often added. Stick with foods that are fresh or frozen without any added seasonings.
- **Take the saltshaker off the table.** Before long, you'll learn to enjoy food without added salt. You might also try salt substitutes, but ask your doctor first.



Try herbs instead of salt to bring out flavors during cooking.

## When Eating Out

- **Request that your food be cooked without added salt.** Most restaurants are happy to meet special requests. If you aren't sure, call ahead and ask.
- **Limit your use of condiments.** Ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, steak sauce, and salad dressings all contain too much sodium. On salads, try lemon juice or vinegar and oil instead.
- **Avoid eating in fast-food restaurants.** Fast food is often high in salt. If you do eat fast food, ask for a nutrition information guide. Read it before ordering and make a low-sodium choice.



Call the restaurant ahead of time and ask whether it serves low-sodium dishes.

## When Shopping

- **Read labels before buying packaged foods.** Check the serving size and the number of mg (milligrams) of sodium in each serving. Try to keep sodium under 1,500 mg a day unless your doctor tells you otherwise.
- **Check for high-sodium ingredients.** These include monosodium glutamate (MSG), brine, sodium chloride, and baking soda. Avoid foods with high-sodium ingredients near the top of the list.
- **Avoid processed foods.** Foods that are precooked or prepared are often high in sodium. Avoid foods that are pickled, aged, smoked, or cured.
- **Select fresh or frozen foods without added seasonings.** If you choose canned foods, look for salt-free versions.
- **Choose low-salt snacks** such as unsalted pretzels or crackers, air-popped popcorn, frozen juice bars or sherbet, or yogurt.
- **Buy low-salt breakfast foods,** such as fruit or fruit juice, bread, hot cereal (not instant), or shredded wheat.
- **If you use antacid tablets,** choose a brand that is sodium-free.



Canned foods are often high in sodium, so remember to check labels.

## AVOID THESE HIGH-SODIUM FOODS

Refer to this list for some foods that are often high in sodium:

- |                                      |                     |                            |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| • Canned fish                        | • Fast-food burgers | • Potato or tortilla chips |
| • Canned vegetables and soups        | • French fries      | • Pretzels, salted         |
| • Cheese                             | • Lunchmeats        | • Pudding, instant         |
| • Crackers                           | • Mustard, ketchup  | • Relish                   |
| • Cured meats (such as ham or bacon) | • Nuts, salted      | • Sauerkraut               |
|                                      | • Pancakes from mix | • Smoked meats and fish    |
|                                      | • Pickled foods     | • Tomato juice             |

# Making the Most of Life

Having cardiomyopathy doesn't mean you have to stop doing all of the things you enjoy. Although you'll always need to follow your treatment plan, you can continue to be active. So feel free to plan special outings and spend time with your friends and family.



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